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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL SESSION

(20 September 1995)

1. In accordance with the agreement reached by ECE member Governments meeting at the Ad Hoc Informal Meeting on 13 September 1995, the Commission held a Special Session on 20 September 1995. It was attended by representatives from Albania, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

2. The session was attended by a representative of the European Commission.

3. Representatives of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the following specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations were in attendance: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

4. The session was opened by the Chairman of the Commission, Mr Romulus Neagu (Romania).

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

5. The Commission adopted its agenda as contained in document E/ECE/1325.

GE.95-24407

Item 2: Cooperation with FAO

6. After considering various options governing action to be taken for its future work in the field of Agriculture, the Commission decided to postpone until its fifty-first annual session a decision on the future of the Committee on Agriculture. At that time it would benefit from the interim report of the Ad Hoc Working Group to be set up to review the work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

7. The delegation of the Russian Federation expressed strong support for the work of the Committee on Agriculture. Noting that a number of delegations were not ready to support a move towards the creation of a joint body between ECE and FAO, it called for the maintenance of the Committee, its subsidiary bodies and the secretariat dealing with these matters. It stated that this was of primary interest to the countries in transition especially those which were not members of FAO for which the Committee was the only body in this field within the region. It stressed the importance of the secretariat taking all necessary steps to provide resources to maintain work in this field until such time as action to merge the two bodies could be initiated.

8. The delegation of Canada stated that its Government attached importance to ECE's work on the standardization of perishable produce. It noted that, while recognizing the possible duplication of work with the Codex Alimentarius, it was important that the work be continued irrespective of where it took place. It stressed the need for ECE standards to be adopted by Codex, since the latter was recognized as an international standards setting body in the WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement. It felt that such standards carried greater weight in the context of possible trade disputes. While noting that non-FAO members would prefer to work in the ECE, they could participate fully in the work of Codex Alimentarius as members of WHO. Moreover observer status at the FAO provided for full participation in technical discussions except for voting rights. It went on to state its view that countries in the process of acceding to the WTO should consider the possible importance to their trade interests of ECE standards becoming Codex standards. It proposed that the question of where the work is done be taken up at a later date.

9. The representative of FAO reiterated the FAO position as expressed during the recent consultations. It reaffirmed the readiness of the Director General to consider the ECE proposal to establish a new joint body which it saw as a streamlining of the present intergovernmental machinery and provided a forum with ample membership to deal with Agriculture issues of particular interest to the European region. FAO considered the outcome of the consultations as positive and intended to give serious consideration to the outstanding issues on many of which there is agreement in principle. It indicated that FAO would have welcomed an

early decision by ECE to pursue the setting up of a joint body, in order that it too could take the necessary administrative and legal procedures.

10. The draft decision contained in document E/ECE(1995-S)/L.1, which called upon the Committee of Agriculture at its forty-sixth session in November 1995 to adapt its programme of work to the limited ECE secretariat resources currently available for work in this area pending the Commission decision in April 1996, was adopted (decision 2 (1995-S)). The Chairman invited the Executive Secretary to transmit the decision to the forty-sixth session of the Committee on Agriculture and requested him to continue this consultations with the Director General of FAO.

Item 3: Measures to enhance the ECE programme of work and to achieve greater efficiency and savings

11. In introducing the item the Chairman recalled the agreement reached at the Ad Hoc Informal Meeting on 13 June 1995 to invite Governments at the expert level to meet under the chairmanship of Vice-Chairman Ambassador Skogmo (Norway) as friend of the chair to discuss elements of a possible draft decision to set up a Working Group to define the strategic directions of the Commission's future work, and to consider proposals for efficiency savings. He explained that the Vice-Chairman had reported to the Ad hoc Informal Meeting on 13 September on his consultations and presented to the meeting a draft decision which had been agreed upon among delegations at the expert level ad referendum. The Ad hoc Informal Meeting had agreed to consult capitals with a view to adopting the text at the present Special Session.

12. The delegation of the Russian Federation stated that it had no objection to the adoption of the draft decision on the elaboration of a declaration to strengthen economic cooperation in Europe, since this was a practical implementation of paragraph 13 of decision A(50). It contended that the main task of the Ad Hoc Working Group should be the elaboration of strategic directions for the future work of the Commission taking into account the new realities in Europe and the needs and priorities for the development of the countries in transition. It went on to seek assurances from the countries of the European Union that the review of the effectiveness of the work of the Commission and its priorities would not be carried out to the detriment of the countries in transition.

13. The delegation of Ukraine supported the draft decision which it saw as the reflection of the important stage in the work of the ECE. It considered the text was in the direction envisaged by those who had initiated the draft decision leading up to the Jubilee session. It referred to the completely new situation in the region and the opportunities this offered to the ECE. Its Government fully supported the draft decision and affirmed its support for the work to be undertaken.

14. The delegation of Canada referred to the follow-up to the Halifax Summit decision on UN reforms and reinforcement of coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of international institutions, and expressed its strong support for the proposed ECE review of its mandates and programme of work. It underlined the need to concentrate on subparagraph (d) of the decision which focused on the achievement of savings within all aspects of its operations, and subparagraph (e) determining its appropriate niche, given the number of organizations devoted to various aspects of economic cooperation in Europe. It stressed that the Working Group should make every effort to ensure that its work remained within the current ECE budget and did not represent empire building. In defining ECE's role it urged the Working Group to pay particular attention to maximizing effectiveness of ECE in relation to other organizations such as OECD and OSCE. It recommended that the Working Group include in its report information concerning any aspect of the current mandate which could be either wound up or performed more efficiently by another UN organization.

15. The delegation of Switzerland proposed to amend the wording of subparagraph (c) by adding the words "and coordinate" after "promote".

16 The delegation of Spain speaking on behalf of the countries of the European Union noted that the draft decision made specific mention of the needs of the countries in transition. It underlined the wish of its member countries to see the exercise benefit all ECE member countries, including those in transition.

17. The delegation of the United States of America expressed its support for the draft decision and for the statements made by the delegations of Spain and Canada. It reaffirmed that the exercise should be for the benefit of all ECE members and should remain within existing resources.

18. The draft decision as contained in document E/ECE(1995-S)/L.1, with the amendment proposed by the delegation of Switzerland, was adopted (decision 1 (1995-S)). The Chairman announced that the Working Group would determine its own methods of work and that the Bureau of the Commission would jointly provide the chairmanship of the Working Group and assure the coordination of its work. The Chairman also informed the meeting that he would in consultation with member Governments announce shortly a date for the Ad Hoc Meeting on Savings called for in decision A (50) and in the decision just adopted. He invited the Executive Secretary to support the activities of the Working Group and to bring the decision to the attention of the Commission's subsidiary bodies.

19. Under this item the Commission also adopted the report of the Conference of European Statisticians on ECE Statistical Publications, as contained in document ECE/CES/46. In so doing it noted that the question of publications would be a part of the ongoing review of ECE 's work.

20. It also agreed to submit the proposal of the Working Group on Engineering Industries and Automation to hold its meetings annually to the Ad hoc Working

Group for its consideration and recommendation in the context of its review of the work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies.

Item 4: ECE cooperation with the Council of Europe

21. The Chairman recalled the agreement reached at the Ad Hoc Informal Meeting in June to hold consultations between the Bureau of ECE and representatives of the Council of Europe concerning the invitation of the Committee on Economics and Development of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council to hold a joint meeting with ECE in 1996 on the transition process in eastern Europe. He explained that those consultations were held on 18 September and he drew attention to the background paper prepared by the secretariat reflecting the main points of the consultations.

22. He referred to the strong support of ECE member Governments for closer cooperation between ECE and the Council. While noting that delegations had had little time to consider the background paper, he hoped they might be ready to authorize the Executive Secretary to continue his consultations with the Council to prepare the meeting on the understanding it would be organized by the Council with the cooperation of ECE rather than jointly with ECE, and within existing resources.

23. The delegation of Croatia supported cooperation between ECE and the Council and was in favour of the proposed meeting in Warsaw. However it raised the question of sensitivities between government representatives and parliamentarians, noting that participants in ECE meetings should be on an equal footing. It also advocated a broad interpretation of the area of countries in transition.

24. The delegation of Poland supported the proposal of the Council which it saw to be in keeping with decision A (50). It recalled its long standing recommendation for strong cooperation between ECE and other international organizations and institutions. It considered the chosen topic to be very appropriate and of benefit to all participants.

25. The delegation of Ukraine expressed its gratitude to the Polish Parliament for the invitation it had extended. It also considered that the invitation to the ECE was a tribute to its high level of competence in the issues relating to the countries in transition.

26. The delegation of Hungary also expressed its support for the proposed meeting and the topic suggested. It hoped the participation of parliamentarians, government representatives and the private sector would foster the transition process.

27. The Commission agreed to accept the invitation to hold a meeting with the Council of Europe, and called on the Executive Secretary to continue his consultations to ensure the necessary ECE presence and participation in the meeting, as well as the circulation of information about the meeting, on the understanding it would be organized by the Council in cooperation with ECE and within existing ECE resources.

Item 5: Other business

28. The Chairman announced that the next ad Hoc Informal Meeting would be held on 29 January 1996.

29. Under this item the Executive Secretary also outlined the implementation of the special measures announced by the Secretary-General, relating to the current financial situation.

30. The delegation of Turkey took the floor to describe developments in the preparation of the Habitat II Conference to be held in Istanbul. It referred to the session of the Committee on Human Settlements which had just ended and the three conclusions it had reached. Firstly it had agreed that the ECE written contribution to the Conference would go to the February meeting of the Preparatory Committee. Secondly, the Committee recommended that the secretariat attend the February meeting at a high level. Thirdly an ECE Forum will be organized at the Conference for which the Government of Turkey together with the secretariat would prepare a feasibility study.

31. The present report of the Special Session was approved by the Bureau of the Commission on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat.

DECISION 1 (1995-S) DECLARATION ON STRENGTHENING OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Economic Commission for Europe,

Recalling Commission decision A (50), paragraph 13, in which the Commission decided, inter alia, "to convene its fifty-second jubilee session in 1997 at high level with the view to adopting a Declaration on strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe which would define strategic directions of future activities of the ECE",

Decides to establish an ad hoc Working Group to define strategic directions of future activities of the Commission, reflecting new realities in the ECE region and taking into account the needs and priorities of economic development of the countries in transition as well as budget capacity and possible recommendations of the ECE ad hoc meeting on savings;

In order to define these strategic directions, the ad hoc Working Group should, in consultations with the subsidiary bodies where appropriate,

(a) evaluate the work and performance of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies and consider the implications of this evaluation for the priorities of the ECE and for the programme of work in both priority and non-priority areas, and suggest appropriate action;

(b) consider ECE's responses to the needs and priorities of economic development of the countries in transition;

(c) consider ways to promote and coordinate possible cross-sectoral issues;

(d) evaluate the cost effectiveness of the Commission's work with the view to preparing proposals on efficiency savings to be considered at an ad hoc meeting of the Commission;

(e) consider the impact on the Commission of preparations for and follow-up to global conferences;

(f) take into account, where appropriate, other ongoing processes relative to UN Reform, particularly those being considered during the 50th Anniversary Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and developments in the OSCE, OECD and other relevant organizations with a view to avoiding duplication in defining ECE's role;

(g) present an interim report on its work to the fifty-first session of the Commission;

(h) based on the above, prepare a draft Declaration on strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe to be presented to the fifty-second jubilee session of the Commission in 1997 for adoption.

DECISION 2 (1995-S) FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

The Economic Commission for Europe,

Recalling its decision A (50),

Emphasizing the importance of work of the ECE in the field of agriculture,

Recognizing the special needs of countries which are not members of FAO,

Noting with appreciation the long-standing and fruitful cooperation between ECE and FAO in the field of agriculture carried out by joint inter-governmental bodies and a joint secretariat,

Noting the decision of the FAO Council in June 1994 to strengthen FAO regional and subregional offices by withdrawing staff from the regional commissions, including ECE,

1. Invites the Committee on Agriculture at its forty-sixth session to adapt its programme of work for 1996 to the limited ECE resources currently available for work on Agriculture, following the withdrawal of FAO posts, pending a decision by the Commission at its fifty-first session on its future work in this field;

2. Invites the Executive Secretary to continue his consultations with FAO on modalities of further cooperation between ECE and FAO.